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STATIUS' ROMAN PENELOPE:
EXEMPLARITY, PRAISE AND GENDER IN *SILVAE* 3.5

τί δ' ἂν ἐγὼ σοι, ἔφη, δυναίμην συμποῶσαι; τίς
δὲ ἢ ἐμὴ δύναμις; ἀλλ' ἐν σοὶ πάντα ἐστίν· ἐμὸν
δ' ἔφησεν ἢ μήτηρ ἔργον εἶναι σωφρονεῖν.
(Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7. 14)

“Tutta la riflessione dell’antichità classica sulla
donna è fatta in prospettiva androcentrica”

(Mazzoni Dami 1999, 14)

1. Introduction

During the last two decades, scholars have devoted increasing attention to Statius' poetic works, including his *Silvae*¹. Previously, the *Silvae* were at best treated in passing, as in J. Wight Duff's 'Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age', for whom these poems “have the elegance of the eighteenth century”; Duff adds that “[s]ome of the missives have a tone that would have suited the boudoir of a French marquise or the library of a noble patron of letters in the time of Queen Anne or the early Georges.”² After a long period of disdain for and neglect of the *Silvae*³, modern

¹ A systematic overview of the research on the *Silvae* which has been produced since the mid-1980s is a desideratum. The two research reports by Cancik (1986) and van Dam (1986) do not go beyond 1984.

² J. Wight Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age. From Tiberius to Hadrian*. Edited by A. M. Duff, London 1960 (first ed. 1927), 393.

³ See, for example, Cancik (1965) 9–12 and Vessey (1986) 2755: “Often lambasted as a frigid writer, Statius will always be a frost for those with certain preconceived notions about poetry and what they have a right to expect from it. (...) The real problem is of style and theme. Many have been prepared to concede that Statius is excellent in his chosen area; but somehow his excellence fails to grip. Such people simply do not want to read poems of the sort Statius wrote, or at least not written in the way he chose. Excellence, duly conceded, is left to admire itself, a Narcissus without a pool.” It is, however, interesting to note that Eduard Norden, who is known for his often harsh judgements of Latin writers, had a rather positive opinion of the *Silvae* (*Die römische Literatur*, Leipzig 1954, 83): “Der begabteste Dichter der Kaiserzeit bis auf Claudianus war P. Papinius Statius. (...) Seinen Haupttruhm für uns bilden die *Silvae* (...). Mögen diese Produkte einer Klientenpoesie auch nicht an die naive Ursprünglichkeit Catulls heranreichen, so sind sie doch – von der gespreizten Sprache

research has made substantial progress in understanding and appreciating the nature of these poems. Their panegyric character is no longer taken as a basis for criticism, but is instead explained by their proximity to epideictic rhetoric. Hardie (1983, 74) has rightly emphasized the uniqueness of these poems in Roman literature:

“There is nothing quite like the *Silvae* in extant Latin poetry. In form and content, they mark a new literary departure, and they seem to fall outside any known tradition. (...) The basic literary affinities of the *Silvae* can, however, be determined with some precision. Statius was deeply influenced by trends in contemporary Greek display poetry and rhetoric, and his ultimate debt is to the kind of publicly recited Greek poetry which he heard, and which he himself delivered, in Naples and at the Neapolitan Games.”

This article is mainly concerned with Statius' *Silvae* 3. 5, addressed to his wife Claudia and probably written after 92 A.D., shortly before the author died (perhaps in 96 A.D.)⁴. It intends to demonstrate how exemplarity and praise, features familiar from other *Silvae*, are intertwined in this poem with the question of gender roles. At the same time, it will be argued that the praise of other people as well as of places in this poem is closely connected with the persona of the author and that it amounts to a proud portrayal of himself and his art. Statius' *Silvae* 3. 5 will then be compared briefly, first, with *Silvae* 2. 7, a *genethliacon* written to honour the deceased poet Lucan and his wife Polla; second, with some of Ovid's poems from exile that are addressed to his wife (esp. *Trist.* 1. 6, 4. 3, 5. 5 and 5. 14) and to the poetess Perilla (*Trist.* 3. 7); and third, with a letter by Pliny the Younger concerning his wife Calpurnia and her virtues (*Epist.* 4. 19).

2. Analysis of Statius' *Silvae* 3. 5

The poem begins with a question in which Statius inquires of his wife why she is worrying day and night. The first two lines already encapsulate one of the ideas that is central to the poem. Their relationship is presented as a close and intimate one; they seem to spend the whole day together, with the result that Claudia's anxieties cannot escape Statius' attention. How sensitively he perceives her emotional state during the night is indicated by the way in which he describes her sighs: the switch between the vowels *u* and *i* in the phrase *ducis suspiria cura* (v. 2) properly mirrors the sounds she is

abgesehen – neben Martials Epigrammen das Unmittelbarste aus der Poesie der Kaiserzeit, und in einigen Stücken (z. B. III 5 ad uxorem, V 3 epicedion in patrem, V 4 an den ihn fliehenden Somnus) strahlt das warme Empfinden des lebenswürdigen Dichters durch den Panzer aller Rhetorik siegreich hindurch.” See also the overall rather balanced assessment given by Vollmer (1898) 21.

⁴ See Laguna (1992) 341: “Estacio menciona en la *Silva* la derrota en el Agón Capitolino (vv. 31–3), que aconteció en el año 90. Menciona también la terminación de la *Tebaida*, del año 92 (vv. 35–6). El 92 sería, pues, un *terminus post quem*. Come en esta *Silva* se plantea y proyecto de mudanza a Nápoles, algo que había ocurrido para el año 95 (...); la *Silva* se escribió entre 92 y el 95.” Burck (1986) 216 thinks it is “etwa aus dem Jahre 93/94 n. Chr.” Coleman (1988) xvii assumes that Books 1–3 of the *Silvae* were simultaneously published after January 93.

producing⁵. It is also noteworthy that she is apostrophized as *uxor* at the end of the very first line so that the reader knows exactly how the author stands in relation to the addressee.

Immediately after the introductory question, it is pointed out that the reasons for Claudia's concerns are not to be sought in broken faith or in her diminished love for her husband (v. 2–10). For Statius, it is beyond doubt that his wife is an exemplar of faithfulness, as he effectively underscores by the accumulated negations in lines 3–6 as well as by the repetition of the negated verb *datur*:

*non metuo ne laesa fides aut pectore in isto
alter amor; nullis in te datur ire sagittis
(audiat infesto licet hoc Rhamnusia vultu),
non datur.*

This line of thought is pursued further by an allusion to the *Odyssey*. Statius indulges in the hypothetical construct of how Claudia would behave if he were on a journey for twenty years, like Odysseus. His answer is striking: unlike Penelope, Claudia would not take refuge in a cunning device such as the unravelling of a shroud that she would be weaving for her father-in-law. Instead, she would react in a much more straightforward way in order to retain her status as a *matrona*: she would dispel possible suitors by using weapons (v. 10: *armata*) instead of verbal disguise. It is important to note that Statius stylizes his wife as an even “better” and by all means more efficient Penelope, who does not need any trick to preserve her integrity should the need to do so arise⁶. The double emphasis contained in the words *sine fraude palam* (v. 10) sets her apart from the deceitfulness and cunning that the Romans often associated with the Greeks (see Petrochilos 1974, esp. 43–45; Balsdon 1979, 31–33) and, more specifically, with depraved women⁷. However, this must be interpreted as a tongue-in-cheek remark, since Claudia is again compared with Penelope, as a prototype of female loyalty (*fides*), later on in the poem (v. 46–47, see below).

After Statius has made it sufficiently clear that any sign of unfaithfulness must be completely ruled out in the case of his wife, he assumes that the true reason for her sorrows lies in the fact that he is planning to move to Naples. In what follows, the

⁵ All quotations from the *Silvae* are taken from Edward Courtney's OCT edition (P. Papini Stati Silvae, Oxford 1990).

⁶ Laguna (1992) 350 lists a number of instances from Roman literature where Penelope is cited as “un trillado paradigma de fidelidad”. It is certainly true that Penelope is frequently used by Roman authors as an *exemplum* of female virtue, and there can be no doubt that, in the *Odyssey*, she must be seen in contrast to “bad” women such as Helen or Clytemnestra. However, this passage in *Silvae* 3. 5 presents a unique case, since it puts the ideal Roman *uxor* Claudia on an even higher level than the paradigmatic ‘model wife’ of Greek myth.

⁷ It must, however, be recognized that the concept of women as being more deceptive than men can be found in works by Greek writers as well, e.g. in Aristotle, *Hist. anim.* IX 1 608b8–15 (see Fögen 2004, 229).

poet combines praise of Claudia's female virtues with an encomium about his hometown in order to persuade her to join him. Naples is described as a place that is congenial to her lifestyle. As she is not interested in any public contests or noisy theatres, she will surely appreciate the calmness of Naples (v. 14–18):

*cur hoc triste tibi? certe lascivia corde
nulla nec aut rabidi mulcent te proelia Circi
aut intrat sensus clamosi turba theatri,
sed probitas et opaca quies et sordida numquam
gaudia.*

The contrast between Naples and the city of Rome is connected with an emphasis on Claudia's outstanding moral qualities, presented in a way that reminds the reader of the codex of values expressed, for example, in funerary inscriptions for Roman *uxores*⁸.

In the following lines, Statius emphasizes once again the special and lifelong nature of their relationship. This section of the poem (esp. v. 22–28, but also the subsequent lines) attains an almost elegiac spirit, since Venus is invoked as the goddess who has brought them together. In addition, the image of the wounded lover (v. 24–26: *quae me vulnere primo ... fixisti*) as well as that of the reins that the lover willingly accepts (v. 26: *tua frena libens docilisque recepi*) are reminiscent of Roman love elegy. In this part of the poem, it is conspicuous how frequently pronouns pointing to Claudia are used. In lines 22–43, there are altogether twelve demonstrative pronouns (forms of *tu*) or possessive pronouns (forms of *tua*), which means that there is an emphatic reference to Claudia in at least every other line. At the same time, it should not be overlooked that these deictics are intertwined with nine pronouns referring to Statius⁹, a fact which could be interpreted as an attempt to give both partners a similar prominence. But if one examines the content of lines 28–42 a bit more carefully, it becomes obvious that the relationship in question is much more focused on the poet than on his wife. It was *his* success as a writer that was admired by Claudia, *his* failure in the Capitoline contest for which she felt pity, and the production of *his* poems which she has closely followed over the years. As one would expect in a Roman context, it is the husband who is a public figure, active through his poetry, whereas the dutiful wife remains in the background in order to play a rather passive role.

⁸ Funerary inscriptions from the Roman Republic and the early Empire repeatedly record virtues such as *obsequium*, *pudicitia*, *castitas* and *fides*. See von Hesberg-Tonn (1983) 106–237, Treggiari (1991) 230–249, and Shelton (1990) 177, who rightly affirms the formulaic character of these documents, revealing ideal conceptions rather than actual qualities, as well as Laguna (1992) 356, who lists further literature.

⁹ Stat. silv. 3. 5, v. 23: *mibi*, v. 24: *me*, v. 28: *me*, v. 31: *meis*, *nostrae*, v. 33: *mecum*, v. 34: *nostra*, v. 36: *mea*, v. 40: *mibi*.

It is precisely from this perspective that Statius voices his amazement at Claudia's hesitation to join him in Naples (v. 42–43) and appeals to her *fides*, which she has demonstrated on numerous other occasions and which puts her on a par with famous heroines such as Penelope. This amounts to the statement that she knows as well as these heroines how to be loyal and has dedicated her life to her husband¹⁰. Proof of her genuine *pietas* is adduced in the subsequent lines, where it is mentioned that Claudia, even after her marriage to Statius, has never ceased to honour her deceased former husband, who seems to have been a poet too (v. 51–54). It is implied here that Statius may count upon similarly dutiful devotion from Claudia after his death. To her daughter, the child by her first partner, she shows equal devotion and care and thus constitutes a paradigm of motherly love. This theme is further illustrated by a short comparison with two instances from myth, Alcyone and Philomela, which liken Claudia to a bird fluttering around her nest (v. 54–59). This association with birds, which symbolize motherly affection and dedication, reinforces the impression of her tremendous unselfishness that the reader has already gleaned from Statius' earlier description of his wife. The mythical examples accentuate the picture of her as someone who lives her life not for herself but for others.

Statius next assumes that one essential reason for Claudia's reluctance to move away from Rome is the fact that her daughter is still unmarried. He takes the opportunity to dwell upon the daughter's gifts of beauty and mind (v. 63: *formaeque bonis animique meretur*), both of which make it very likely that she will soon find a husband. But as in Claudia's case, the picture that Statius draws of his stepdaughter resembles his preceding remarks about his wife: she plays the lute and sings admirably well, but she does so with a voice that reminds one of her real father (v. 64: *voce paterna*), and it is her stepfather Statius' poems that she interprets (v. 65: *mea carmina flectit*). It is not surprising to read in the subsequent line that her talent and skill are only surpassed by her integrity and her modesty (v. 67: *ingenium probitas artemque modestia vincit*). In other words, Statius confirms that female virtues are more important for a young girl than any artistic gifts. In particular the active creation of art, like the composition of verse, was not regarded by the Romans as the domain of women, although it was perfectly acceptable for a girl to be educated in music and song. But too much erudition was frequently associated with unnecessary or even inappropriate expertise and thus with a transgression into male territory. In contrast to courtesans, Roman *matronae* were expected to remain within the confines of their gender role even with regard to artistry, since an active participation in activities such as literary

¹⁰ Stat. silv. 3. 5, v. 50–51: *nec minor his tu nosse fidem vitamque maritis / dedere*. It is remarkable that the revised 1955 edition of J. H. Mozley's translation of Statius' *Silvae* (Cambridge, Mass. & London 1928, rev. ed. 1955) still contains a rather dated rendering of *maritis*: "Yet you no less than these are loyal, and your life is devoted to your lord."

production would have aroused suspicion in a male-dominated society¹¹. These restrictions also applied to dancing, which is practised by Claudia's daughter (v. 66: *candida seu molli diducit brachia motu*). Part of the function of the aforementioned reference to her integrity and modesty is to point out that despite her gracefulness, attractiveness and even her artistic talents there is nothing to diminish her flawless reputation.

In order to dissipate his wife's concerns about whether it would be advisable in this particular situation to leave Rome, Statius now switches the perspective to Naples and what the city has to offer¹². After the praise of Claudia's and her daughter's exceptional virtues he moves on to an encomium of his hometown, which he seeks to present as a place congenial to the two women's moral integrity (v. 69–105). But a careful reading of this part of the poem, in which ephrasis is fused with a strong emphasis on the fundamental parameters of Statius' and his family's value system, must lead to the conclusion that it is as much a commendation of the city as of the poet himself. He closely follows the principles of epideictic rhetoric which taught that people ought to be praised in a similar way as cities. Parallels have been established between Statius' description of Naples and the theory outlined by Menander Rhetor¹³, but one may also draw attention to a passage from Quintilian's much earlier *Institutio oratoria*, which is particularly illuminating in this respect (*inst.* 3. 7. 26):

Laudantur autem urbes similiter atque homines. Nam pro parente est conditor, et multum auctoritatis adfert vetustas, ut iis qui terra dicuntur orti, et virtutes ac vitia circa res gestas eadem quae in singulis: illa propria quae ex loci positione ac munitione sunt. Cives illis ut hominibus liberi sunt decori.

The final sentence of this excerpt may especially serve to illustrate what Statius is doing in his poem. By highlighting Naples' numerous amenities as well as its impeccable moral atmosphere, he leads the reader to the conclusion that someone born in such a city must be equally commendable. The picture that he draws of Naples with its civilized life and peacefulness is meant to evoke the association with a *locus amoenus* and even the spirit of the golden age where there is eternal peace and where laws are superfluous. With its pleasant climate and its tranquillity, it is set apart

¹¹ For details, see Hemelrijk (1999), which contains a special section on Roman attitudes towards women writing poetry (1999, 174–180). One may also consult the brief survey in Habinek (1998).

¹² On the ancient tradition of "Städtelob", see the general overviews by Classen (1980) and Pernot (1993) 79–82, 178–216, who each assemble further secondary literature. Szelest's analysis (1972b) focuses on lines 81–105 of *Silvae* 3. 5, which she compares with numerous other descriptions of cities in Roman literature.

¹³ Details are provided by Burck (1987) 147–149. On the analogy between the glorifying description of people and of cities, see especially Menander Rhetor, *Rhet.* III 346.27–31 Spengel (= p. 32 Russell & Wilson), along with Pernot's (1993, 189–191) more general observations on the alignment of these two forms of praise.

from Rome and of all its hustle and bustle¹⁴. Yet at the same time, it is made clear that Naples is not a barbaric place. This is presented as an important argument directed towards his wife, but one cannot overlook its humorous connotation, as Claudia must have known well enough that Naples was indeed a cultivated city.

On the surface, the long ephrasis, which comprises about one third of the entire poem and which is typical of Statius' tendency to dwell upon extensive descriptions of buildings, works of art and landscapes, serves to underpin his purported intention, i.e. to persuade his wife to join him for Naples. However, the final lines leave no doubt that this poem is much less concerned with actual persuasion than with the portrayal of the poet's exemplary relationship with his wife. And one may even go a step further and argue that ultimately it all amounts to a self-depiction: everyone and everything is centered around the artist with the result that the poem is much more about him than anyone else. In the end, Statius puts a stop to his account as if no further arguments were needed to make the case for leaving Rome (v. 106–109):

*sed satis hoc, coniunx, satis est dixisse: creavit
me tibi, me socium longos adstrinxit in annos.
nonne haec amborum genetrix altrixque videri
digna?*

Through the double repetition of *satis* (v. 106) and the pronoun *me* (v. 107) these lines have a very emphatic effect. The phrase *creavit me tibi* encapsulates the central idea that lies behind the poem: Statius affirms that he was made for Claudia, and this entails the expectation that she should not only follow him to his hometown, but that her entire life be centered around her husband's interests and occupations. The direct address by the noun *coniunx* in v. 106, which is repeated in v. 110 (there with the addition of the attribute *carissima*), sounds almost like an appeal to her duties as a Roman *matrona*. Moreover, the future tense *venies* in v. 110 is much more direct than a possible subjunctive and, together with the even more pronounced *praevenies* in the next line, reinforces the impression that Claudia cannot refuse his wishes. The two final lines suit the overall notion that her own life is completely defined through that of her husband. It must be pointed out that this is a declaration that is not made by Claudia herself, but by Statius.

On the whole, it cannot be denied that *Silvae* 3. 5 constitutes no exception as far as the depiction of an ideal marital relationship in ancient Rome is concerned¹⁵. There is,

¹⁴ On Naples as a cultural rather than political centre during the first century A.D., see Newlands (2002) 30 and also Hardie (1983) 2–4, who elaborates upon the Greek character of the city.

¹⁵ Characterizations of the ideal wife can certainly also be found in the Greek tradition, in particular in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and, later on, in some of Plutarch's treatises, which differ in certain respects from earlier concepts (see Treggiari 1991, esp. 183–228; Mazzoni Dami 1999). *Ex negativo* definitions can be traced back to texts such as Semonides, *fr.* 7 West. For the Greek context, Treggiari (1991) 202 accurately observes that “[t]he subordination of the wife to the control and interests of the husband and to the well-being of the household is a constant theme.”

however, some reason to go further and identify numerous traces of Statius' idealization of both his family and his own persona. It would be misleading to take this poem at face value and to see it as an authentic testimony of matrimonial harmony or even of Statius' "humanity and urbanity"¹⁶. The simple fact that the *Silvae* are indebted to epideictic rhetoric, which entails pronounced encomiastic praise, suffices to demonstrate that these poems should not be read as some sort of autobiographic document, unless "biography" is understood here as it was in antiquity. Statius uses his *Silvae* not only to portray his environment (in this particular case his own family), but also for self-stylization. The persuasive character of *Silvae* 3. 5 is no more than a part of this stylization. The poem is neither a real *sermo* between Statius and his wife¹⁷, as Claudia nowhere gets an opportunity to reply, nor is it supposed to represent a true speech, although it does make use of a coherent argumentative structure¹⁸. It is part of the irony of the poem that, in the end, one realizes that Claudia did not, and should not, require any adhortation. Both female figures, mother and daughter, resemble each other in that they embody models of virtuous behaviour. However, unlike Statius, they remain somewhat lifeless characters without any significant individual traits. It is precisely their exemplary nature that denies them a true personality. By contrast, Statius himself reveals a number of details about his life and work as a poet, and wherever he mentions his wife and his stepdaughter, they are directly connected with him – in fact so much so that one may argue that their lives are defined entirely through his own existence. The praise of Claudia and of Naples ultimately serves as an encomium about himself both as an artist and as a human being.

3. A glance at Statius' *Silvae* 2. 7

By placing poem 3. 5 at the end of the third Book of the *Silvae*, Statius assigns to it the function of a σφραγίς ('seal') and thus grants it a rather pronounced position in the collection, which puts it on a par with *Silvae* 2. 7, composed in honour of the

¹⁶ See Burck (1986) 227: "(...) über seine persönliche und situationsmäßige Gebundenheit hinaus kommt diesem Gedicht in der römischen Literatur als einem der wenigen Zeugnisse der Harmonie und des gegenseitigen liebevollen Verständnisses zweier Ehegatten ein besonderer Rang zu." A similar position is taken by the same scholar in a later article (Burck 1987, 153): "Seine Eclogie an Claudia (...) ist in der Tiefe der Empfindung und in dem feinen Takt der Werbung um eine Zusage seiner Gattin ein schönes Zeugnis von der Humanität und Urbanität des Statius."

¹⁷ See *Silv.* 3 pr. 20–23: *summa est ecloga qua mecum secedere Neapolim Claudiam meam exhortor. hic, si verum dicimus, sermo est, et quidem securus ut cum uxore et qui persuadere malit quam placere*. The assertion that the poem intends to aim at delight rather than persuasion must be seen as an exaggeration that formed part of the tendency of ancient *praefationes* to play down the readers' expectations (a modesty topos).

¹⁸ I am not convinced, however, that it captures the spirit of the poem to claim that it "has the character of a well-argued legal case" (Newmyer 1979, 119). Apart from the basic structure (*exordium*, *argumentatio*, *peroratio*; see Vessey 1976/77, 135; Laguna 1992, 340), there is not much that gives the impression of a speech that was delivered in court.

deceased Lucan's birthday and addressed to his wife Polla¹⁹. Although that piece is written in a very different tone and metre (hendecasyllables)²⁰, it also celebrates the achievements of a great poet and bestows glory upon him. It is intriguing that *Silvae* 2. 7 also contains some direct references to Polla²¹: not only did Lucan write a charming address to her that will give her fame and standing (*titulum decusque*), Polla is also apostrophized as *casta* (2. 7. 62f.) and thus characterized as an exemplary *uxor*. It has been assumed that Statius' address to his own wife in *Silvae* 3. 5 was inspired by Lucan's *Adlocutio ad Pollam* alluded to in 2. 7²², but since the latter is not extant, that hypothesis must remain in the realm of speculation. Suffice it to say that in a later passage of *Silvae* 2. 7 Polla's merits are accentuated in a way reminiscent of Claudia's (v. 81–88):

*nec solum dabo carminum nitorem,
sed taedis genialibus dicabo
doctam atque ingenio tuo decoram,
qualem blanda Venus daretque Iuno
forma, simplicitate, comitate,
censu, sanguine, gratia, decore,
et vestros hymenaeon ante postes
festis cantibus ipsa personabo.*

Lucan's poetry (*carminum nitorem*) and his marriage to Polla are presented as being inextricably interwoven. She is learned enough (*doctam*) to appreciate her husband's poetic talent. Yet the phrase *ingenio tuo decoram* is shaped in a way that leaves no doubt about her role as being merely receptive to and admiring of her husband; Polla's "learnedness" does not involve writing her own poetry or engaging in similar occupations which would involve the active production of art. This impression is reinforced by the subsequent asyndetic list of her female virtues, none of which allude to her intellectual capability, but rather to her outward appearance and behaviour as well as her wealthy background. The two goddesses Venus and Juno have been

¹⁹ A detailed commentary on *Silv.* 2. 7 is provided by van Dam (1984) 450–506, who also lists earlier secondary literature. See further Newmyer (1979) 25f., 75–80 and Hardie (1983) 115–118.

²⁰ The reason for the metre is indicated by Statius in the preface of Book 2: he did not dare to compete with Lucan's hexametric poetry and decided for hendecasyllables out of reverence (see *Silv.* 2 pr. 24–26: *ego non potui maiorem tanti auctoris habere reverentiam quam quod laudes eius dicturus hexametros meos timui*). This pronounced gesture of modesty is evidently part of prefatory conventions and can be classified as a *topos*.

²¹ Polla is also mentioned in the first and the third of Martial's three birthday epigrams (γενεθλιακά) dedicated to Lucan (7. 21–23). They form a group, as indicated by the thematic and verbal correspondences. See Henriksen (1998) 99–101 for details.

²² See, for example, Newmyer (1979) 34 and Hardie (1983) 60, who surmises that the *Adlocutio ad Pollam* may have formed part of Lucan's *Silvae*, but who rightly admits that nothing is known about their nature.

chosen very consciously, as they respectively stand for erotic attraction and for a Roman housewife's integrity; no Minerva is needed here, which indicates that an extraordinary degree of erudition is not envisaged as an essential attribute of a Roman *uxor*.

That Polla truly is *rarissima uxorum* (*Silv.* 2 pr. 23) is also specified in the final part of the poem (v. 120–131), where she is contrasted with the mythical figure of Laodamia, who purportedly kept a wax image of her dead husband Protesilaus around which she created a Dionysiac cult²³. Unlike Laodamia, Polla could not be further removed from irrational adulation and frenzy. She worships Lucan as himself (v. 126: *ipsum sed colit*) and does not have the slightest intention of idolizing him or of indulging in deceitful dances (v. 124: *thiasis ... dolosis*). By abstaining from any form of exaggerated passion, she ideally conforms to the obligations that were expected of an honourable *matrona*.

What is more, Statius does not restrict his portrayal to the married couple. In the quoted passage he implicitly integrates his own persona into the narrative by displaying himself as the poet who has the privilege to let the Muse Calliope sing about Lucan's and Polla's exemplary relationship. The three verbs in the first person singular – *dabo* (v. 81), *dicabo* (v. 82) and *personabo* (v. 88) – are all related to the Muse, but as it is Statius through whom she honours the couple, one may argue that they also serve indirectly to testify to the poet's endeavour to present himself as a close friend of the two and to give proof of his own status. That he is one of the singers of the *genethliacon* is evident already from its first part, where he explicitly includes himself in the group of the celebrants (v. 19: *Lucanum canimus*), and after Calliope has finished her hymn, which forms the central piece of *Silvae* 2. 7 (v. 41–104), it is Statius who continues until the end.

To sum up: it is certainly the case that happy marriages play a vital role in the *Silvae*, but it may be doubted whether this should simply be interpreted as “an indication of the importance which the domestic virtues and private life had attained under autocracy” (Hardie 1983, 181). As I have attempted to show for *Silvae* 3. 5 and also for 2. 7, the description of these marriages, in particular the portrayal of the virtuous wives, primarily functions as a means to celebrate their husbands' lives, and in particular Statius' and Lucan's accomplishments as poets²⁴.

²³ See in particular Ov. *Her.* 13. 33f., 13. 151–158, and Philostr. *Imag.* 2. 9: (...) ἡ τοῦ Πρωτεσίλειω καταστροφείῳα οἷς ἐβάκχευσεν (Laodamia being contrasted with Pantheia). For further details see van Dam (1984) 501f.

²⁴ It is thus mistaken to attribute ‘a purely personal character’ to *Silvae* 3. 5, as Szelest (1972a) 91 does.

4. A glance at Ovid's exile poetry

In some respects the technique used in *Silvae* 3. 5 resembles what is familiar from Ovid's exile poetry²⁵. In the *Tristia*, Ovid addresses a number of letters to his wife, not only to provide consolation for her, but also to reflect upon his personal situation. Yet as he points out on several occasions, his poems also have the function to provide fame (*gloria*) for his wife. It is he who celebrates her female merits, in particular her *fides*, which are compared to Penelope's more than once. Thus it is only through Ovid's poetic power that her distinguished reputation is made known in public²⁶. He emphasizes that his wife would not have gained any glory if he had not been banished to Tomis and thus had not been in an extreme situation which required strength on his part as well as on his wife's; his exile therefore provides an excellent opportunity for her to prove her integrity which he, in turn, can aptly praise²⁷. One may, however, argue that, in *Silvae* 3. 5, Statius on the whole exceeds Ovid by developing this strategy even further and that he puts himself even more in the spotlight of his readers' attention.

It must be conceded, however, that *Tristia* 3. 7, addressed to the poetess Perilla, represents a special case. Ovid speaks to her from a perspective that evokes some kind of father-daughter relationship (*Trist.* 3. 7. 18: *utque pater natae duxque comesque fui*)²⁸. He underscores that nature has endowed her with beauty, talent and chastity (*Trist.* 3. 7. 13f.: *nam tibi cum facie mores natura pudicos / et raras dotes ingeniumque dedit*), but also that it was he who introduced her to poetry and functioned as her mentor (*Trist.* 3. 7. 15–18). The idea that the degree of her productivity is dependent upon his presence and that his exile may have interrupted her poetic activities demonstrates that Ovid defines Perilla's artistic achievements entirely through his own persona. In other words: as a poetess, she is really nothing without him, who revealingly calls himself her former *magister* and *iudex* of her poetry (*Trist.* 3. 7. 24)²⁹.

²⁵ Hardie (1983) 152 briefly indicates a general similarity between the *Silvae* and Ovid's exile poetry, but he believes that the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* do not contain any poem that served as a direct model for Statius' work; he nonetheless admits that "the publicised conjugal affection of *Silvae* 3, 5 is first found in Ovid's epistles from Tomi."

²⁶ See especially Ov., *Trist.* 1. 6, 4. 3, 5. 5 and 5. 14. Comparisons of his wife with Penelope can be found in *Trist.* 1. 6. 21f., 5. 5. 51f. (*si nihil infesti durus vidisset Ulixes, / Penelope felix, sed sine laude foret*) and 5. 14. 35f. (*aspicis ut longo teneat laudabilis aevo / nomen inextinctum Penelopaea fides?*).

²⁷ Ov., *Trist.* 4. 3. 79–81: *quae latet inque bonis cessat non cognita rebus, / apparet virtus arguiturque malis. / dat tibi nostra locum tituli fortuna.*

²⁸ The identity of Perilla has been much debated; it has been assumed that she was Ovid's stepdaughter. For details, see Luck's commentary (P. Ovidius Naso: *Tristia*. Hrsg., übersetzt und erklärt von Georg Luck. Band 2: Kommentar, Heidelberg 1977, 199) as well as Hemelrijk (1999) 149–151, who regards the name "Perilla" as a pseudonym.

²⁹ They did indeed read their works to each other (*Trist.* 3. 7. 23: *dum licuit, tua saepe mihi, tibi nostra legebam*), but it is not true that they "criticized each other's poetry", as Hemelrijk (1999) 150 maintains. If one follows Ovid's text (*Trist.* 3. 7. 24–26), the criticism must be seen as one-dimensional and as coming from the male "grandseigneur".

In the second half of the poem (*Trist.* 3. 7. 31–54), Ovid encourages Perilla to resume her writing in order to gain immortal glory and presents himself as a model that she ought to follow: despite his banishment into exile he cannot be deprived of his talent and continues to compose poetry. Throughout *Trist.* 3. 7, and even in his exhortation to the gifted young lady, Ovid concentrates almost entirely on himself and his role as a renowned artist; he uses only the very final lines to wish Perilla much success in achieving eternal fame through her art. The poem thus shows a certain similarity with the passage in *Silvae* 3. 5, which Statius dedicates to a characterization of his step-daughter, although, unlike Perilla, she limits her endeavours to merely reciting poetry (Statius' poetry, that is) and does not produce any verse herself.

5. Pliny the Younger: *Epist.* 4. 19

In order to demonstrate that Statius' strategy of praising himself through the example of others, in particular through female figures, was by no means unique in Roman literature, I shall continue with some reflections on Pliny the Younger, an author who has only rarely been discussed in connection with Statius, although he was his contemporary. One of the most obvious similarities between the two writers that only a few scholars have mentioned in passing and never analysed in depth is the way in which they portray their wives³⁰. Both Pliny and Statius employ analogous methods when they talk about their female partners, and the glorification of these women's virtues ultimately leads to praise of the male authors themselves.

Pliny's Letter 4. 19 is addressed to Calpurnia Hispulla, his wife's aunt, who has long been one of his intimate friends³¹. She is introduced as an example of piety (§ 1: *pietatis exemplum*), as she took great care of her niece Calpurnia, who is now married to Pliny³². He assumes that the subsequent description of his wife will be particularly welcome to the aunt, who is to be thanked for having taken responsibility for the model education of Calpurnia. The wife's behaviour is summarized at the beginning of the catalogue of her virtues where it is pointed out that she has proved to be worthy of her father, her aunt and her grandfather. This statement reveals how central it was for women, according to Roman thinking, not to be a disgrace for the family. Pliny's wife is said to have a sharp mind (*acumen*) and to possess modesty (*frugalitas*) and

³⁰ On this issue, Burck (1986) 219 n. 24 and Shelton (1990) 167 n. 16, 168 n. 19, 181 have no more to offer than a footnote and do not enter upon a comparison of *Silv.* 3. 5 und *Epist.* 4. 19.

³¹ An extensive analysis of *Epist.* 4. 19 is provided by Shelton (1990), who also deals with the more general legal and social aspects of Roman marriage (esp. 178–186; for a much more extensive analysis of these issues, see Treggiari 1991); see also von Hesberg-Tonn (1983) 101–103 and Maniet (1966). On women in Pliny the Younger's *Epistles*, see Vidén (1993) 91–107 as well as the very brief outlines by Dobson (1982) and Wolff (2003) 79f.

³² Calpurnia seems to have been Pliny's second wife, as can be inferred from his reference to the death of his former wife in *Epist.* 9. 13. 4. See Wolff (2003) 73 for details.

chastity (*castitas*). Like Statius' Claudia, she takes an interest in literature, yet this interest is not presented as something that she pursues *per se* but rather out of affection for her husband³³. Furthermore, it is conspicuous that she does not seem to be concerned at all with other writers' literary works. According to Pliny's description, it is only his own books that she reads; indeed, she reads them thoroughly and repeatedly, as is signalled by the frequentative verb *lectitat* (§ 2), and even learns them by heart (*ediscit etiam*). She does the same with his verses, which she recites out of love (§ 4: *amore*). When he is giving a speech in a lawsuit, she is eager to receive reports about his success, and during his recitations, she is sitting behind a curtain, listening eagerly to the applause (§ 3)³⁴. The latter constitutes an eloquent testimony to Calpurnia's standing entirely in the background and to her role as a mere admirer of her husband's glory³⁵. Her intellectual activities are thus completely defined through and centered around Pliny, and as in the case of Statius' wife, she is sketched as an individual that is dependent upon her male partner³⁶. Thus it seems justified to consider her to be one of the "femmes effacées" in Pliny's corpus (Wolff 2003, 79), who corresponded to the traditional expectations regarding the role of women in Roman society³⁷.

Given this picture of female passivity, one cannot help getting the impression that Pliny's letter intends to portray his own pursuits and achievements rather than his

³³ A high degree of intellectualism among Roman *matronae* was apparently seen as unbecoming (see Hemelrijk 1999), as one may conclude from Juvenal's vivid, albeit exaggerated, sketch in *Sat.* 6. 434–456; cf. *Mart.* 2. 90. 9: *sit non doctissima coniunx*, and 11. 19. 1. For a comparison of Pliny's and Juvenal's views on women, see Shelton (1990) 164, 177, who observes that "their expectations about the proper role of a wife are, in fact, quite similar" (1990, 164).

³⁴ See especially the final sentence of *Plin. epist.* 4. 19. 3: *eadem, si quando recito, in proximo discreta velo sedet laudesque nostras avidissimis auribus excipit*. This sentence is quite revealing since it does not say anything about Calpurnia's appreciation of the quality of Pliny's literary products. As a result the emphasis is not on her intellect or her literary tastes; according to this letter's outline, her main function is not to listen to the recitation but rather to perceive the audience's praises of her husband.

³⁵ See also *Plin. epist.* 4. 19. 5: *Non enim aetatem meam aut corpus, quae paulatim occidunt ac senescunt, sed gloriam diligit*. A Roman wife could achieve *gloria* by fulfilling as much as possible the role of an exemplary *uxor*, but not by assuming a prominent and active role in public.

³⁶ The image that Pliny presented of his wife Calpurnia seems to have left a lasting impression on some later writers, as can be seen from a passage in Sidonius Apollinaris' letter to Hesperius (*Epist.* 2. 10. 5): *opus est ut sine dissimulatione lectites, sine fine lecturias; neque patiaris ut te ab hoc proposito propediem coniunx domum feliciter ducenda deflectat, sisque oppido meminens quod olim Marcia Hortensio, Terentia Tullio, Calpurnia Plinio, Pudentilla Apuleio, Rusticiana Symmacho legentibus meditantibusque candelas et candelabra tenuerunt*. It is intriguing that, although in the next paragraph (*Epist.* 2. 10. 6) Sidonius includes Lucan and Polla among further examples of relationships in which famous writer husbands were dutifully supported by their wives, he does not mention Statius and Claudia. Sidonius was certainly familiar with Statius' poetry and admired his *Silvae*, as can be gathered from *Carm.* 9. 226–229 and 22 postf. 6.

³⁷ There are other examples in Pliny's corpus of letters, e.g. *Epist.* 5. 16 on the death of Fundanus' young daughter, esp. 5. 16. 2–4 containing a catalogue of her female virtues and 5. 16. 9 on the girl as the father's living image: *amisit enim filiam, quae non minus mores eius quam os vultumque referebat, totumque patrem mira similitudine exscripserat*.

wife's³⁸, and this is clearly something that his letter has in common with Statius' description of Claudia in *Silvae* 3. 5. Pliny describes himself as a successful lawyer and established writer who is a prominent and respected figure in Rome, but who also "cultivated" his young wife³⁹. At the same time, the eulogy of his wife functions as a praise of her aunt who successfully paved the way for her role as a devoted *uxor*. Calpurnia Hispulla, who is greeted and congratulated for raising her niece at the beginning of the letter (§ 1), is also addressed in the last three paragraphs (§§ 6–8), which makes the ring composition of this short encomium obvious. It was her impeccable lifestyle that provided the model for the character of Pliny's wife. But what is more, she also had a formative influence on his own upbringing by being closely attached to his mother (§ 7):

Nam, cum matrem meam parentis loco verereris, me a pueritia statim formare, laudare talemque, qualis nunc uxori meae videor, ominari solebas.

By situating Calpurnia Hispulla as an intimate family friend, Pliny emphasizes in what kind of society he was raised and is still at home. The fact that he is now married to the niece of a most respectable Roman matron, who symbolizes the perfect guardian of the *mos maiorum*, forms a crucial part of his self-representation. Like Statius, he constructs his identity through exemplary figures by whom he is surrounded and thus becomes a praiseworthy model himself⁴⁰. One might be tempted to call this technique 'egocentric art', but such a classification would surely misrepresent a Roman author's self-definition and his striving for recognition from his readers. In addition, a strong focus on the author's own persona and an implicit or explicit commendation of the self were inherent in the nature of the epistolary genre.

³⁸ The general fact that Pliny's Letters are almost always as much about himself as about other topics has been correctly observed by Wolff (2003) 46: "(...) à côté de leur thème central, la majorité des lettres ont un second sujet, Pline lui-même. Car une lettre a beau traiter de tout autre chose, il y est presque toujours un peu question de Pline. Et c'est sa forte présence qui fait en premier lieu l'unité de recueil." See also Wolff (2003) 47: "Pline aurait pu écrire comme Chateaubriand dans la première préface de *l'Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*: «Je parle éternellement de moi»."

³⁹ A similar impression of the husband as the educator of his wife is created in *Epist.* 1. 16. 6, referring to Pompeius Saturninus: *legit mihi nuper epistulas; uxoris esse dicebat. Plantum vel Terentium metro solutum legi credidi. quae sive uxoris sunt ut adfirmat, sive ipsius ut negat, pari gloria dignus, qui aut illa componat, aut uxorem quam virginem accepit, tam doctam politamque reddiderit.* It is noteworthy that Pliny not only doubts the authorship of the wife, but that he also accentuates the archaic style of the letters in question. It was a common stereotype in Graeco-Roman antiquity that women tended to use a more archaic diction than men (see Fögen 2004, 221–223).

⁴⁰ Therefore, it cannot be maintained, as Maniet (1966) 184f. does, that in *Epist.* 4. 19 Pliny simply wanted to express "son amour pour son amour" and that he did not pursue any specific agenda or interest.

6. Conclusions

Both Statius' *Silvae* 3. 5 and Pliny's Letter 4. 19 are stylized as private communications, addressed to two female characters, each of whom embodies the ideal of the honourable wife. In both cases, however, the eulogies of female virtues amount to a praise of the authors themselves and of their accomplishments as active members of Roman society, in particular of their literary success. This demonstrates how private and public facets of genres that purport to be occasional or even ephemeral, such as a letter or a collection of miscellaneous impromptu verse compositions like the *Silvae*⁴¹, are interconnected.

For Statius in particular, it needs to be underscored that, while there is no doubt about the fact that "[t]he *Silvae* are poems of praise" (Newlands 2002, 2f.), this praise is by no means restricted to the emperor Domitian or wealthy patrons, but indeed extends to a greater or lesser degree also to the author himself. *Silvae* 3. 5 is an example of a poem where the private sphere is evoked in order to effect a transition to the thematization of the public reputation of the poet. Following the strategies of epideictic rhetoric, both Statius and Pliny praise the moral qualities of their wives, and, in addition, of two other female figures: Statius refers to his stepdaughter, Pliny to his wife's aunt. Yet by defining all of these women's existence completely in terms of their relationships with men, the authors transform their depiction of the women into an extensive portrayal of themselves. What at first seems to be a treatment of female exemplarity, quickly develops into a determined praise of male achievements.

It is precisely the epideictic character of such texts that cautions against reading them as realistic descriptions of their authors' lives. Exemplarity and praise ought to be understood as a conscious idealization, an attempt to enhance the writers' reputation and perhaps also to set up models for their readers, provided that one is inclined to attribute a didactic tendency to this type of literature⁴².

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⁴¹ On the meaning of the title *Silvae* see the discussion in Vollmer (1898) 24f., Newmyer (1979) 3–8, Bright (1980) 20–49, Hardie (1983) 76, van Dam (1986) 2748, Vessey (1986) 2761, Coleman (1988) xxii–xxiv and Newlands (2002) 36f.

⁴² This paper, presented at King's College London (November 2006), Università Ca' Foscari Venezia (April 2007), Sofia University Sv. Kliment Ohridski (July 2007), and University of California Berkeley (September 2007) was written in the paradisiacal atmosphere of the Fondation Hardt in Geneva, to which I owe my heartfelt gratitude for a generous research fellowship; Monica Brunner deserves particular recognition for her warm welcome. Erik G. Huneke (University of Michigan) and Jan-Mathieu Carbon (University of Oxford) were kind enough to read my text with great diligence and enthusiasm.

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Summary

This article is mainly concerned with Statius' *Silvae* 3. 5, addressed to his wife Claudia. It intends to demonstrate how exemplarity and praise, features familiar from other *Silvae*, are intertwined in this poem with the question of gender roles. At the same time, it will be argued that the praise of other people as well as of places in this poem is closely connected with the persona of the author and that it amounts to a proud portrayal of himself and his art. Statius' *Silvae* 3. 5 will then be compared briefly, first, with *Silvae* 2. 7, a *genethliakon* written to honour the deceased poet Lucan and his wife Polla; second, with some of Ovid's poems from exile that are addressed to his wife (esp. *Trist.* 1. 6, 4. 3, 5. 5 and 5. 14) and to the poetess Perilla (*Trist.* 3. 7); and third, with a letter by Pliny the Younger concerning his wife Calpurnia and her virtues (*Epist.* 4. 19).